

How to Fly with Clipped Wings

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/36551599) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/36551599>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Dream SMP , Minecraft (Video Game)
Relationship:	TommyInnit & Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)
Characters:	Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Blood God TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Hurt/Comfort , Angst with a Happy Ending , Slavery , Winged Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Protective TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Protective Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Villain Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Non-Consensual Body Modification , (Phil gets his wings clipped) , Phil Watson-centric (Video Blogging RPF) , Fictional Religion & Theology , Angst , Dramatic Irony , Mistaken Identity , Technoblade and TommyInnit are Siblings (Video Blogging RPF) , Character Death , Blood , BAMF Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Blood Brothers (Blood God!Tommy AU)
Collections:	Completed stories I've read , Found family to make me feel something , Completed fics I adore , 💎*. fics so perfect that they change the definition of perfection (๑'๓'๑) 💎* , Mar's Big Library (dsmp) , Fics I enjoy , Mar doesn't know how to handle this it's just so so so good , SBI Fics (mostly Techno-centric) , Fanfics I'd eat again at 3 am and already have , Things , Stories That I So Adore , This is such a good fic-- WAIT WHEN DID I GET TO THE END , Very Chewy Fanfiction (/pos) , MCYT , I swear to god if I start crying I'm blaming youuuu /pos , I liked these fics and I finished them , hixpatch's all time favorites , SBI FICS TO HEAL MY SOUL , Found family my beloved , BedrockBros to heal the sadness in the world!!! , Fics I would read again , alexs fav ffs :] (mostly crimeboys and sbi), Fanfiction Masterpieces , These DSMP fanfictions give me LIFE! , cauldronrings favs (｡◕｡)◕ , Books I've already read <33 , Talented , Brilliant , Incredible , Amazing , Showstopping , Spectacular , finished fics i've read , THESE ARE SO GOOD WHY ARE THEY SO GOOD??!! (mcyt edition) , JAP's favourite MCYT fics , fics to feed on again and again
Stats:	Published: 2022-01-20 Completed: 2022-02-19 Words: 18,291 Chapters: 6/6

How to Fly with Clipped Wings

by [lockergirl](#)

Summary

“The reason I want you is simple,” Dream said, “You're going to kill the Blood God for me.” Philza looked up at the king in complete disbelief. “Are you kidding me?”

“You’re a demigod,” Dream responded, “I’ve seen you take down fifty trained soldiers in a row before breaking a sweat.”

“Yeah, *human* soldiers. Not a *literal* god.”

Or: Cursed with wings, Philza has spent his entire life chained to masters who see him as both a demigod and subhuman. Once captured by King Dream of the Essempi, he is given a new mission: to kill the Blood God. Tommy may or may not be said god.

Notes

This is a sequel to "How to Smile with Bloody Teeth." You can *technically* read this one first, but you are going to be missing out on a lot of dramatic irony.

- Translation into Русский available: [Как Летать с Подрезанными Крыльями](#) by [Killin_Kel](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Philza wasn't sure when he had been cursed. Maybe he had been doomed from his first gasp of air. Maybe it had been earlier than that, his fate somehow sealed in the womb. Maybe there had been a few days of peace before everything was ruined.

It didn't really matter. When he was a week old, his mother had entered the temple of the high god XD, depositing her swaddled baby directly into the head priest's arms.

"He has wings," she said simply, looking down at her son with empty eyes, "I don't know what to do with him."

The priests had been more than eager to take Philza off his mother's hands. His mother had been equally eager to leave.

Things could have been worse, those first few years of his early childhood. Philza was never, under any circumstances, allowed outside the temple, and he was never allowed a single moment of privacy, but the priests were generally kind to him, if a bit distant and serious. Most of them thought he was some sort of demigod, since his father's identity remained a mystery. Others thought he was a literal godling, or blessed by one of the deities. One other, who stayed only briefly, thought he was a monster, and argued that he should be put down like the abomination he was. That priest was gone by the next morning, glares following him on his way out.

Phil had no friends or freedom, no one to kiss him goodnight or hold him close, but he had teachers and caretakers. He ate well. They gave him a few toys. Things were fine.

Then, shortly after his sixth birthday, the queen of their tiny nation came to visit. The priests had insisted it was an honor, dressing him in the robes reserved for holy holidays.

The queen was a short woman with a harsh brow. She had taken one look at Philza's wings, still nothing more than fluffy black down, before nodding, motioning to her guards.

"I'm taking him," the queen said simply, "Compensate the temple as necessary."

Philza had said nothing as he was pulled out onto the street for the first time in his life, too startled by all the loud noises and bustling people. In the moment, he didn't realize that he was leaving behind the only home he'd ever known. He didn't notice that he wasn't allowed to bring any of his clothes or toys. All he could focus on was his excitement, overwhelmed by the anxious hope that he would get to see a bit more of the outside world.

That hope only faded slightly when the castle gates closed behind him, locking him into his new home.

What the queen wanted was simple: if Philza was truly a demigod or something close to it, then he'd be a good soldier. The queen's advisors claimed that he'd be stronger and faster than any other recruit. They insisted that his wings would be the perfect tool for war. Philza had never even seen a sword close-up before, but if becoming a soldier meant a bit more freedom, he was more than willing to learn.

It took only a few seconds into his first training session to get his first bruise. Within the hour, he had a black eye and a new cut on his left arm.

It was the first time he had ever been truly injured, and it scared him. Besides a few scraped knees and jammed fingers, the temple had been safe. Philza had never known real pain.

That changed very quickly.

Training was long and hard, and as the months stretched on, it got no easier. But there were results. Philza first learned how to properly hold a sword, then how to use it. He quickly became proficient with the bow, crossbow, and axe as well. With each passing lesson, he got fewer bruises and landed more hits.

The queen's advisors had been right. He was a born soldier.

He didn't get a chance to use it. Just before his 11th birthday, the kingdom was attacked. As part of the peace treaty, Philza was handed over.

He served a new king now. This one was worse.

It wasn't because the training was harder. Philza could deal with that. What he couldn't stand were the endless parties and processions, the constant feeling of being dolled up and put out on display. The king's guests loved to fawn over his freshly developed feathers, stroking and plucking his shiny black wings as he stood dutifully in place for hours, never speaking a word.

He hated it. He hated it more than anything else in the world. Being a soldier was tolerable. Being a pet was humiliating.

But he lived with it. He had no choice in the matter.

He was sent into his first battle at age 13. He killed one man. The blood felt like it stained his hands for weeks.

According to the king, it wasn't enough.

The next time he was sent onto a battlefield, he killed two men. Then, during the next battle, one. Then two again. Three. Two. Five. Seven. Six. Ten. Four. Twelve.

During one battle, an arrow missed Philza's throat by a mere inch. Panicked, he shot up into the air, flying directly back to where his army had made camp. The king hadn't liked that. His servants clipped Philza's wings that night.

On his fifteenth birthday, Philza killed thirty soldiers before breaking his wrist. After that day, he stopped counting.

If his wings hadn't felt like a curse before, they did now.

After his first two masters, Philza never stayed anywhere for long. He'd go out onto the battlefield, killing as many enemies as he could, until the war was won or lost. His side was not often the one that surrendered, but if they did, the victor's demands would always include him.

"The Angel of Death," they'd say, "now belongs to us." It seemed as though everyone had forgotten his real name.

Philza stopped trying to get comfortable anywhere.

Some of his new masters were kind. One let him eat dinner at her table every night. Another gave him a shelf of novels in his room.

Those were the rare cases.

Most of Philza's masters clipped his wings. He could fight almost as well when limited to single flaps and simple glides, and it made escape attempts almost impossible. None of them called him by his name, more commonly referring to him as "Angel," if anything at all. His bedrooms were always locked from the outside, but he still cherished these spaces. They were his only reprieve from fighting and training. If he was lucky, he'd be given a few candles, or even better, a small window.

Every time his wings were clipped, every time he was locked away, every time someone took their anger out on him, Philza would comfort himself with the idea that eventually, too, this kingdom would be forced to surrender. Maybe his next master would be kinder.

Philza was thirty-three when the Badlands fell to the Essempi. Not even a day had passed after the surrender before Philza was in a new castle, held down while his wings were clipped once again. The hands pushing down on his wrists and back were pointless. He hadn't struggled during a clipping in years, having quickly learned that a poorly done job would just lead to unnecessary blood and pain. It was easier, if humiliating, to just let it happen.

During the entire ordeal, Philza tried to ignore the sight of cut feathers on the floor, focusing instead on a painting of who he assumed was the kingdom's ruler: a tall man in a white mask.

As soon as the disfigurement was done, Philza was led down several staircases, ushered into a windowless room full of empty cages. Without complaint, he folded himself into one of them, doing his best not to flinch as the door clanged behind him, lock clicking.

Another birdcage. He'd been through this before, four masters ago.

Philza bit back a sigh. This wasn't going to be one of his better experiences. Though the cage was just long enough to lay down in, it was too small for him to stand or fully stretch his wings.

A man in white sunglasses crouched down next to Philza, peering through the bars.

“You now belong to King Dream of the Essempi,” the man said, “He’ll be here soon to talk to you. Please try to show some respect.”

Philza nodded. The man adjusted his sunglasses, stood back up, and left the room, followed by the soldiers. They left the candles lit.

Well, small blessings, Philza supposed.

He laid back, trying his best to fix his feathers. The cut one were lost causes, but one of the soldiers had been unnecessarily rough during the clipping, jostling his feathers out of place. He couldn’t reach all of them, but each one he managed to reposition settled another itch in his wings.

He sighed deeply. This wasn’t so bad.

At that moment, the door to the room slammed open, revealing a tall man in a green cloak and porcelain mask. Resting on top of his head was a breathtaking golden crown, adorned with sparkling emeralds of various sizes.

Philza’s breath caught slightly, half in apprehension and half in awe. The crown was *beautiful*. What he would give to hold a single one of those emeralds in his hands.

King Dream, Philza assumed, closed the door behind him, leaving him alone with his new weapon.

There was no tension in Philza’s body. He had spent years learning how to look non-threatening.

“Angel of Death,” Dream said, expression hidden behind his mask. His voice seemed cheerful enough, however, “It’s great to finally have you.”

Philza leaned his head forward, as close to a bow as he could manage without smacking his wings against the sides of the cage.

“I know your current accommodations are a bit... underwhelming,” Dream said, a hint of a joke in his voice, “but I’m sure we can arrange something better if you’re good.”

Ah. So that was Dream’s game. That was fine. Philza could play it.

He nodded, keeping his gaze down.

Dream took a step closer to the cage. There were a few beats of silence before he continued.

“I brought you here for a very specific purpose,” Dream said, “Did George tell you what that was?”

Philza had no clue who George was, so he shook his head.

“Have you heard of the Blood God?” Dream asked, looking intently at Philza, “It’s okay if you speak, by the way. I want to be sure we’re on the same page.”

Philza nodded. “Yeah,” he said simply, repositioning his wings slightly. No matter how he configured them, they always ached in a cage this small.

“What do you know about him?”

Philza took a breath. “He’s one of the younger gods, isn’t he? Not like XD or Lady Death. And he’s the patron god of soldiers.”

“Good. What else?”

Philza shrugged. “That’s all I know.”

Dream frowned, but didn’t press it. “Even if he’s young, he’s powerful,” the king said, half-mumbling to himself, “According to legend, 100 years ago, he single-handedly ended a decades-long war in less than a week by slaughtering the leaders on both sides. He’ll have grown stronger since then.”

Dream turned his head back towards the cage. Immediately, Philza averted his eyes. Even if Dream was wearing a mask, it wasn’t a slave’s place to meet his master’s gaze.

“He’s doing it again,” Dream said bluntly, “Apparently, he’s angry about the Essempi’s wars. He’s already killed three of my generals, and there are reports that he’s heading towards the capital.”

Philza nodded. His masters usually liked when he made it clear that he was listening.

“The reason I want you is simple,” Dream said, “You’re going to kill the Blood God for me.”

Philza looked up at the king in complete disbelief. “Are you kidding me?”

“You’re a demigod,” Dream responded, “I’ve seen you take down fifty trained soldiers in a row before breaking a sweat.”

“Yeah, *human* soldiers. Not a literal *god*.”

“Are you talking back to me?” Dream asked, voice suddenly cold. All at once, a sense of danger returned to the room.

A chill ran down Phil’s spine. What had he been *doing*? He knew better than to argue. “No, sir.”

“Good,” Dream said, but the edge in his voice wasn’t gone. “I’m not a bad guy, you know. I’m not going to send you out there unprepared. I have a way of finding out the Blood God’s weaknesses.”

The confusion in Philza’s expression must have been clear, but Dream wasn’t given a chance to explain. At that moment, two soldiers burst through the door, dragging a kicking and

screaming teenager between them.

“Fuck you, you bitches!” the kid said, almost managing to bite one of them. His blond hair looked tussled, as though he hadn’t gone down easy. “Get your hands off of me!”

Without responding, the soldiers threw the teen into another cage, locking it quickly behind him.

Philza’s eyes widened. The boy next to him couldn’t be more than 15 or 16, judging from the baby fat that still clung to his cheeks. What was Dream doing with someone so young?

Dream motioned to the child. “Angel of Death,” he said smugly, “Meet the Blood God’s right hand man.”

Chapter End Notes

Woo 3/4 SBI is almost here!

For context, there is about a 100 year time skip between "How to Smile with Bloody Teeth" and this fic. Techno and Tommy have been super happy doing tons of Blood God stuff together because they're brothers. This is the first real hiccup they've had since the whole "Techno getting human sacrificed" thing.

Also thank you guys for all your support on the last fic!!! We're at just under 1200 kudos and 250 bookmarks??? That's CRAZY! I love you guys!

Please consider leaving a comment. I cherish them all like my own children and they fuel my writing like nothing else.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The kid was practically snarling at Dream, reaching his hands through the cage's bars like a rabid animal.

"Fuck you!" he screamed, leaning back so he could kick the side of the cage, "Who the hell do you think you're fucking with?"

Dream let out a laugh. "Oh, I know exactly who I'm dealing with right now," he said, smugness practically dripping from his words, "You're the Blood God's chosen priest."

The kid stopped struggling immediately. He looked at Dream incredulously. "I'm the *what?*"

"Don't play dumb," the king said, grabbing one of the bars rough enough to shake the cage. The kid, to his credit, did not even flinch, confusion still plastered on his face. "You're the one who's been trying to convert my troops. And wherever the Blood God goes, you follow like a stray dog."

The kid nodded slowly. "Right. The Blood God, just to make sure we're on the same page here, is a big guy? Pink hair—?"

"I told you not to play dumb," Dream interrupted, "We both know what the Blood God looks like."

"Uh, okay then," the kid said, still looking very confused, "... Yeah. I'm a Blood priest. You got me."

Philza could sense the king's victorious expression even through the man's mask. "Here's how it's going to go: You're going to tell me everything you know about the Blood God. Who he is, his strengths, his weaknesses, *everything*. And then maybe I won't kill you."

The boy blinked innocently. "Why? Interested in converting?"

Philza snorted, immediately stifling it with a cough when Dream glared at him.

"The Blood God has killed three of my generals in the past week," Dream said, voice gritting out from between his teeth.

"*What?*" the kid asked, eyes wide in genuine surprise, "That's crazy! I haven't seen him in, like, two or three weeks at this point. I had *no* idea he was doing that."

Dream crouched down in front of the cage, getting on the kid's eye level. Or at least, Philza assumed it was eye level. It was a little hard to tell with that massive mask.

"You're going to help me," Dream said.

The kid scoffed. “Why the fuck would I help you? You kidnapped me and threw me in a cage!”

“Because,” Dream said, “if you don’t tell me the Blood God’s weaknesses, I’ll kill you.”

The kid, to Philza’s utter disbelief, started laughing. “Yeah, good luck with *that* plan.”

Dream paused. Like Philza, he seemed completely taken aback by the response.

“Alright,” he eventually said, standing back up, “You know, I’m not a bad guy, Tommy.” The kid tensed at the use of his name. “I’ll give you some time to think it over. I was going to move you somewhere nicer, but you can spend the night in your cage.”

Without another word, Dream stormed out of the room, guards following him.

The kid, Tommy, huffed. “What a fucking dickhead,” he groaned, rubbing his hands together. “No wonder all his generals are getting murdered.”

Philza considered saying something, but before he could make up his mind, Tommy leapt to the front of his cage, clasping his hand around the padlock that was keeping him in.

Philza jumped at the flash of light that suddenly filled the room. For a moment, there was a warm, red glow in Tommy’s hand, as though he was holding the world’s strangest firefly between his fingers. He squeezed tighter around the lock, and the light started growing brighter before—

Nothing. Tommy dropped the lock with a curse, shaking his hand out.

“Fuck,” he hissed to himself, “Come on, Techno, I was really banking on you...”

“What the fuck was that?” Philza exclaimed.

“Apparently not enough,” Tommy whined, sounding genuinely disappointed.

“No,” Philza said, struggling to string his words together, “I mean— You— How did you do that?”

Tommy shrugged, leaning back slightly. “I guess I’m the ‘Chosen Priest of the Blood God’ or whatever.”

Philza just sat with that for a moment.

The kid’s eyes shot up, a hint of curiosity in them. “Who are you? Do you *‘know the Blood God’* too?”

“I’m the Angel of Death.”

“Angel of Death?” Tommy scoffed, “What kind of name is that? No fucking way is that your real name.”

“That’s what my masters call me,” Philza said, feathers ruffling slightly.

“‘Masters?’” Tommy asked, all humor dropping from his voice.

Philza nodded.

Tommy paused, examining Philza carefully. The man averted his gaze. Even if Tommy was caged, he was still a higher rank than him. Philza needed to be more careful.

“Does Dream... own you?” Tommy asked cautiously, “Is that why you’re in a cage?”

Philza nodded again, suddenly feeling very nervous. He wasn’t sure what Tommy was thinking, and that was always dangerous.

“Right,” Tommy said, voice very serious, “We’re going to have to do something about that when we break out of here.”

Philza blinked, a little startled by the use of the word “we,” but Tommy pressed on too quickly to question it.

“Come on, big man, what’s your real name?”

“I told you,” Philza said, “I’m the Angel of Death.”

Tommy looked at Philza with an intense skepticism. “You mean your mum got pregnant, gave birth to you, and immediately said, ‘Oh, Mr. Doctor, please put ‘Angel of Death’ on the birth certificate! I think it’s such a lovely name for a little lad?’”

Philza couldn’t stop himself from snorting. Tommy smiled.

“Seriously, do you have another name?” the kid asked. There was something genuine in his voice that was hard for Philza to ignore. “‘Angel of Death’ is a bit of a mouthful.”

He hesitated for a moment. “My name is Philza,” he said eventually.

“Philza,” Tommy said, considering the name carefully, “Does anyone ever call you ‘Phil?’”

“People don’t even call me by my full name, mate,” Philza admitted, “It’s usually ‘Angel,’ if they bother to address me at all.”

“Well, that’s bullshit. I’m going to call you ‘Phil,’ if that’s alright.”

Something warm sparked in Phil’s chest.

“Go ahead,” he said, smiling, “I won’t stop you.”

Tommy spent the rest of the evening rambling about random topics, jumping from one subject to another with expert agility. Phil learned about all of Tommy's favorite musicians, his opinions on about 12 different animals, and quite a bit about Tommy's older brother, who was apparently "definitely going to help kick Dream's ass."

"Don't worry," Tommy said, not reassuring Phil in the slightest, "My brother's going to break us out of here. I told him what was happening, and he's coming. It might take him a couple of days, but he'll be here soon."

Although Phil sincerely doubted that anyone was coming for the kid, he was more than happy to let Tommy talk. It had been so long since he had had a genuine conversation. He could barely remember the last time someone had said something to him that wasn't an order.

For the first time in years, someone wished Phil goodnight before he fell asleep.

The next few days passed normally. Phil would wake up, eat breakfast, and then would get corralled out to a courtyard to practice swordplay or whatever other skill his master fancied that day. A chain around his ankle would keep him from moving too far from the practice circle, and he'd do his best to ignore it. Then, as soon as training was done, he'd get herded back into his cage with whatever had been spared for his dinner.

The only difference was Tommy.

Tommy, who was like his own personal sunrise every morning, beaming in the cage beside him. Tommy, who filled the empty air with funny stories and friendly laughs, somehow managing to coax conversation from Phil after long, grueling days. Tommy, who was perhaps the first friend Phil had ever had.

The kid was apparently getting absolutely grilled by Dream and his advisors, all of whom were desperate for any spare piece of information they could learn about the Blood God. As far as Phil could tell, beyond a laundry list of the deity's favorite foods and hobbies, they weren't getting much out of Tommy.

If things didn't change they were probably going to try more intense interrogation methods. They had already started getting rougher, kicking the kid's cage and threatening him.

Tommy seemed to either not know what was coming, or not care. Phil did his best not to think about it.

Luckily, Tommy was a top-tier distraction. Whenever he wasn't using that weird, red light to try and break (melt?) the padlock, he was talking to Phil. He seemed to have opinions on everything, with access to a never-ending stream of conversation topics. Phil didn't have anything too interesting to say in response, sure, but he tried to answer any questions Tommy posed.

He was struggling to answer this one, though.

"Come on," Tommy pressed, "If you could do anything in the whole world, what would it be, big man?"

The question was overwhelming. Phil had often thought, before, about what he would do if given a bit more freedom. In his previous master's house, he dreamed of walking to the farmer's market and trying a bit of the bread sold by the cheerful young woman in the corner stall. He imagined striking up a conversation with her, asking about her stand and complimenting her nice, pink hair. If he was feeling particularly wistful, his daydream might progress to include perusing a few other stalls, perhaps to buy a fresh apple or a bite of chocolate.

Even those dreams had been impossible. For his own sanity, it had been decades since he let himself consider what he would do with *complete* freedom. But now that Tommy's question had opened the floodgates, he was unsure if he'd ever be able to close them.

He could explore the world, seeing every city and biome this continent had to offer before moving on to the next one. He could sail the ocean, discovering long-lost ocean monuments and restoring them to their former glory. He could find the most obscure corner of nature and build a home, free from cages and war and danger. He could find a wife. He could have a child.

He could be safe.

"I think," Phil said finally, "I would want to fly."

Tommy looked a bit confused. "Can't you already fly? What are those massive wings for?"

Phil repositioned his wings awkwardly, trying to maneuver them in his cage. With a pang of embarrassment, he showed his clipped feathers to Tommy.

"I can still glide," he said quickly, "but the last time they let me really fly was years ago, now."

A jolt of shock spread across Tommy's face, only to be immediately replaced by something darker. Phil was completely taken aback by the level of anger in the boy's expression. He hadn't expected the kid to be capable of it.

"They hurt you," Tommy said. There was an edge in his voice that almost scared Phil.

"No, clipping my wings doesn't usually hurt," he said, trying his best to reassure the kid.

"But it's hurting you now," Tommy pressed, clearly angry, "They're taking something important from you! They shouldn't be doing that."

And wasn't that the truth, laid out so simply in front of him. Phil ran his fingers down his clipped feathers, imagining what they would look like whole.

"That's just how it is, mate," Phil said, "They don't want me to try and escape."

Tommy's face switched from angry to upset, looking at Phil as though he was the saddest thing in the whole world.

Phil hated it.

"What about you, Tommy?" he asked, trying to change the conversation, "If you could do anything, what would you pick?"

A spark lit in Tommy's eye. His hands grabbed the bars of his cage as he pressed his face between them, trying to get as physically close to Phil as possible.

"I'd break out of here and take you with me," he said, voice so determined that it almost felt like a promise.

Phil had only known Tommy for a few days, but in that moment, he wasn't sure if he had ever felt more fondness towards another person.

"When my brother gets here," Tommy said, "you're coming with us. And then you'll be able to fly again. I'll make sure of it."

Phil's heart clenched. He didn't want to tell Tommy that his brother probably wasn't coming, and even if he was, he'd be cut down before he made it to the castle walls. He didn't want to tell the kid that even if they did escape, Phil would be hunted down to the ends of the Earth by every king and warlord in need of a trump card on the battlefield. He didn't want to tell Tommy that they were both stuck here, and that it was always better to accept their situation than to get their hopes up and see them crushed.

So instead, Phil just leaned back against the bars of his cage.

"That sounds nice," he said quietly, "Maybe you should get some sleep."

On the fifth morning, Dream personally woke Phil up an hour early, eager to watch him try out a new weapon.

"It's called 'the God-Killer,'" Dream explained, showing off a glowing black sword. Phil tried not to look at Tommy, who was silently scoffing and making faces in the corner, just out of the king's line of sight. "It's specially enchanted to kill deities."

And so Phil had been led out to the training courtyard without any breakfast. Dream had been more than eager to assign exercise after exercise, watching Phil with the eyes of a hawk. After hours of practice, the winged man began to grow tired, but Dream refused to give him a chance to rest.

"He's not going to get any breaks when he's fighting the Blood God," the king insisted when one of his advisors, the man in the white sunglasses, suggested stopping for lunch, "He needs to get used to this."

Over time, Phil's movements started getting slower, his attacks sloppier. He became overwhelmingly aware of the hot sun above him, every hour without water adding to his agony.

Shortly before dinnertime, Philza collapsed onto the dirt, gravel scraping his face and hands as the sword slipped from his grasp.

Dream was furious.

“You can do better than that!” Dream yelled, stomping so hard that Philza curled in on himself. “I’ve seen you slaughter an entire battalion! You’re telling me one day of effort is enough to kill the Angel of Death?”

Philza didn’t respond. He knew the king didn’t really want an answer.

“Pathetic,” Dream hissed, turning sharply and walking off, “George, make sure the Angel is properly punished. And don’t give him any dinner. He’ll have to try harder tomorrow to earn it.”

The man in sunglasses, George probably, sighed hard, motioning for his guards to pick Philza up.

“Take him back,” George said, “Give him some water, but no dinner, like the king said.”

“How else should we punish it?” one of the guards asked. Philza couldn’t stop himself from cringing at the words.

“The dinner’s enough,” George said, “Unlike some people here, I’m not trying to kill him. And make sure he actually eats breakfast tomorrow. He’s not going to be able to fight the Blood God if we starve him to death first.”

A wave of relief rolled over Philza as the guards dragged him back to his cage. Every muscle ached, and he had been dreading the idea of any extra pain.

Tommy seemed to sense his neighbor's exhaustion, keeping his voice relatively quiet and not asking too many questions as he told another story about his older brother. The kid's voice relaxed Phil, giving him a bit of comfort as he let the words slip through his mind.

“Hey, don’t they normally bring us dinner by now?” Tommy eventually asked, sitting up suddenly in his cage.

Phil also sat up. He was so used to skipping meals that he hadn’t even realized that no one had brought in anything for Tommy to eat.

He cleared his throat. “Um,” Phil said, “They said I don’t get dinner tonight. I guess that extends to you. I’m sorry.”

Tommy’s face scrunched up like he had just tasted something sour. “Why don’t you get dinner?”

Phil sighed. “I didn’t do a good enough job training today, so I don’t deserve to eat.”

Tommy’s face darkened. “What do you mean ‘you don’t deserve to *eat*?’”

Phil was a bit too tired to have this conversation, so he leaned against the bars of his cage. “I messed up at training, so I don’t deserve a reward.” He blinked his eyes open. Shit, when had he closed them? He was more exhausted than he thought. “Sorry they forgot your food too. I’ll give you my breakfast tomorrow to make up for it.”

“No you fucking won’t!” Tommy hissed. Phil jolted at the sudden anger, wings flaring out slightly in panic. Realizing this, Tommy schooled his face into something more neutral, though the rage still leaked slightly through. “*You’re* the one who spends all your fucking time training and fighting for them. You shouldn’t be skipping any meals at all!”

Phil blinked. “It’s okay Tommy—”

“No, it’s not fucking okay!” Tommy yelled, sounding a bit less angry and a bit more upset, “Food isn’t something you should have to ‘earn’ from them! They didn’t give you breakfast either. Have you eaten anything at all today?”

Phil reached his hand through the bars, holding it out with an open palm for Tommy to grab. “Hey, hey mate, it’s okay. I’m used to this. You don’t have to worry about me. I’m okay.”

Tommy just paused for a moment before reaching behind his back and dropping something in Phil’s hand.

It was a baked potato, still warm.

Phil’s fingers clutched around it instinctually.

“This—” Phil gasped, not pulling it back into his cage, “How did you—?”

“I’m the Blood God’s ‘right hand man’ or whatever,” Tommy said, a hint of a joke in his voice, “Comes with some pretty nice perks.”

Phil wanted to yank the baked potato away, to tear into it, to fill that empty feeling in his stomach just a bit, but—

Phil broke the food in two, holding the larger half out to Tommy. “Here.”

Tommy shook his head, pushing Phil’s hand away. “I’ve just been sitting in a cage all day.”

“Tommy,” Phil insisted, “Here.”

The kid sighed, acting exceptionally put-upon. “Why do you guys always *do* stuff like this?” he groaned. Phil’s expression did not change as Tommy scowled. “Fine, alright? Look at this.”

Tommy pulled out another baked potato from behind his back, taking a comically large bite out of it. “There,” he said, voice muffled by the food in his cheeks, “Now you can eat all of yours.”

Phil hesitated for only a single moment before pulling both halves of his baked potato towards him, taking almost as large of a bite as Tommy. It was soft and creamy, covered in

butter and green spices. Phil wasn't sure when the last time he had tasted something this good was. He was occasionally allowed to join the soldiers at victory banquets, more for his masters to show him off than anything else, but *this*? This potato tasted *heavenly*, worthy of the gods.

Within the minute, the entire thing was gone.

Tommy had only finished a few bites of his. Breaking a chunk off, the kid reached through the bars, offering the piece to Phil.

Phil was still hungry, but he shook his head. "I can't, mate," he said, "It's yours."

Tommy frowned. "Phil, I've been sitting in a fucking cage all day. I burned literally no calories."

It was so hard for Phil to keep turning down food. Years of lessons had taught him to not take anything for granted, to not let a single chance at a meal slip by, and he was *starving*. So he folded, reaching for the piece and taking a bite. It was just as good as the last one, if a bit less buttery.

Tommy looked extremely pleased with himself, finishing off what was left of his potato and curling up in his cage.

"Night, Phil," he mumbled, reaching his hand through the bars and laying it on the floor.

Phil laid down as well. After a moment, he let his hand slip through the bars too.

"Goodnight, Toms," he said softly, squeezing the boy's hand. A wave of strength rushed through Phil, as though every ache in his body had soothed at once. The relief sent him almost directly to sleep.

Tommy smiled, holding on to Phil's hand as tightly as he could. Phil didn't pull away. Instead, they both drifted off, fingers still clasped together.

Chapter End Notes

DREAM THAT'S NOT A BLOOD PRIEST oh no he has airpods in he can't hear us.

People keep asking me "Is Phil going to adopt Tommy?" FOOLS. Tommy is going to adopt Phil. Tommy may be emotionally younger but he is also the only one who's been allowed to go outside. Phil doesn't know how money works.

Also, please follow/chat with me on [Tumblr!](#) I want to interact with you guys, and in exchange, you'll get to see [mediocre homemade memes like this.](#)

Thank you for reading! Please consider commenting (I cherish each one like my own children and they fuel my writing like nothing else). <3

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A few more days passed. Every night, Tommy looked a little bit worse. At first, there were some bruises on his wrists. Then the marks spread around his neck. Tonight, Phil had found him with a black eye and split lip.

“I’m literally fine,” Tommy said, not a hint of fear in his expression, “I’ll be completely good by morning. Trust me, there’s *nothing* those bastards can do to me. I’ve got the protection of the Blood God or whatever, remember?”

Phil wished he could give Tommy a hug. He wished he could hold the kid, bandaging his wounds and soothing his bruises. He wished he could comfort him and be comforted in return.

But they were still locked in their cages, so he settled for holding Tommy’s hands, arms reaching out between the bars.

In a way, Tommy was right. The kid’s injuries were always completely healed by morning, as though some higher power had tended to them personally. He’d greet a waking Phil with his usual smile, as though he wasn’t facing another day of interrogations. Then he’d hand Phil an extra baked potato to go with breakfast.

Tommy was still as boisterous as ever. The only difference was the muttering, near constant under his breath when he thought Phil wasn’t listening, as though he was trying to convey something very important to no one in particular.

It took Phil three days to muster up the courage to ask about it.

“Why are you talking to yourself, mate?” he whispered, turning over in his cage to look at Tommy. It was late at night, and the torches had burnt out almost an hour ago. In the total darkness, Phil couldn’t even make out the kid’s silhouette.

Tommy’s muttering cut off, as though he had been caught with his hand in a cookie jar. “I thought you were asleep,” he said sheepishly.

“Not quite,” Phil chuckled, pushing himself up onto his elbows, “Anything on your mind? You can talk to me, you know.”

“I know,” Tommy said, and even in the dark, Phil could hear something like a smile in his voice, “I’m just talking to my brother.”

Phil paused. “You— your brother?”

“Yep!” Tommy said, completely unable to see the bewildered look on Phil’s face.

“He—” Phil wasn’t even sure what to say. “Tommy... you understand that your brother’s... not here, right?”

Tommy laughed. “Yeah, no shit, Phil. We can talk to each other whenever. It’s, um, a Blood God thing.”

Phil nodded before realizing that Tommy couldn’t see him. “Um, have the two of you always been able to do this?”

“Nah. Well, I mean, he’s always been able to speak to *me* . Other way ‘round’s a bit more tricky.”

Phil decided, all at once, that he was too tired to wonder if Tommy was crazy. The kid could make red light appear from his hands, even if it didn’t seem to do much. Maybe he *could* talk to his brother while locked away in an underground cage. Phil had seen the boy do stranger things.

“What do you talk about?” Phil asked.

Tommy let out a heavy sigh. “Mostly him trying to find me. Apparently Dream has, like, 14 fucking castles, and he can’t figure out which one I’m in.”

“It’s the one directly across the border from the Badlands,” Phil said.

Tommy paused. “How the fuck do you know that?”

“It took them less than a day to get me here from the battlegrounds, and I’m pretty sure all the other ones are further inland,” Phil explained, “I spent a lot of time looking at maps during the last war. I think my old master wanted me to storm this place, but he surrendered before that could happen.”

Tommy paused again. “Huh,” he said eventually, “Thanks. I’ll let my brother know.”

Phil settled back down on the floor of his cage. He tried not to think about the possibility that he had just enabled a suicide mission. “Tell me more about your brother,” he said, eyes closing.

Phil let himself relax as Tommy eagerly told tales of battlegrounds and high castles, villages and endless wilds. He wasn’t sure how much of it was true. It was certainly too much for a boy as young as Tommy to have experienced. Still, Phil didn’t question it, letting the words hold and comfort him as he drifted off.

“... but I was living by the Arctic, and at that point I hadn’t met my brother yet, so—”

“Wait,” Phil mumbled, trying to wrap his head around Tommy’s words, “I thought your brother was older than you.”

Tommy paused. “He is bigger than me.”

“Then what do you mean 'you hadn't met your brother yet?'" Phil asked, "Wasn't he around when you were a baby?"

Tommy laughed. "Phil, my brother didn't really meet me until he was, like, 22 or something."

Phil frowned. "Did your parents not raise you guys together?"

"Parents?" Tommy said, "Haven't got any parents. Too much of a big man for that shit." There was a bit of rustling as Tommy repositioned himself. "Besides, even if I did have some, they wouldn't have raised my brother. The two of us aren't biological siblings."

Tommy must have noticed Phil's confused pause, because he continued.

"We chose each other," he explained, "Like, I saw him and decided, 'Oh, cool, new brother,' and he just kinda went with it."

"But... how can he be your brother if you're not related?"

"I told you already! We chose each other!" Tommy seemed a little confused that Phil wasn't getting it, so he spelled it out more clearly. "You don't have to be biologically related to be a family. If you want, you can just pick the people you care about."

"... Oh."

Phil had occasionally wondered if he had any siblings. There was no one like him alive, no other winged beasts who prowled the battlefields, no rumors of feathered infants, no covert allies with hidden appendages. If there was any family out there, they hadn't been cursed like him. They probably hadn't even been born at all.

Phil tried to feel grateful instead of jealous.

"Do you have a family, Phil?" Tommy pressed.

Phil hummed in affirmation. "A mother. Though I haven't seen her since I was a baby. She left me at a temple when I was a week old."

Tommy grumbled. "Then she's not really your mother, is she? She only knew you for one week! She's literally a complete stranger!"

Phil smiled. "You know, I've only known *you* for one week, Tommy."

Tommy scoffed. "But that's different," he insisted, "You're actually old enough to remember how cool I am now. And plus, I'm not going to leave you."

Phil didn't know how to describe the feeling in his chest. It was caught somewhere between warmth and mourning, so terrible and wonderful at the same time. For perhaps the hundredth time that night, he wished there weren't bars separating him from the kid in the other cage.

“How...” Phil asked, voice a little unsteady, “... How do you know if someone should be your family?”

He heard Tommy sit up quickly. Even in the dark, Phil could tell that the kid was practically vibrating with eagerness. “You just know, you know? In your heart. They can be doing nothing, and they still feel like the most important thing in the world.” Tommy paused. “You look at them, and you’d do anything to protect them. No matter the cost.”

And that was it. Phil couldn’t protect Tommy. The costs were too high, and he wasn’t willing to pay them.

He cursed himself. How could a coward like him deserve a family? If only he was brave enough to fight Dream. If only he was brave enough to risk what it would take to break Tommy out of here. He could free the boy and go down fighting if he really wanted to, but Phil was just too afraid to disobey. Too afraid to die. Maybe that had always been his problem.

“... Phil?” Tommy asked, sounding uncharacteristically quiet. His enthusiasm was gone. “Are you okay?”

Phil paused before answering. “Yeah,” he whispered, “Don’t worry about me.”

“My brother’s coming for us,” Tommy said, voice firm, “We’re going to get out of here soon.”

Phil couldn’t bring himself to believe it, so he said nothing at all. Without another word, the two of them went to sleep.

Phil turned around just in time to see George sigh.

“That’s enough practice for today,” the advisor said, motioning for his guards. They quickly undid Phil’s chains and yanked him forward, ready to lead him back to his cage.

Phil was more than a bit relieved that training was over. George was a *much* more lenient supervisor than King Dream, but the days were still longer and harder than he would have liked. George didn’t seem to enjoy the situation much either, but orders were orders, and the king seemed to get tenser with every passing day. This wasn’t the time to anger him with protests.

“You did well,” George said. There was no genuineness to the words, but Phil bowed anyway.

“Thank you, sir,” he said quietly.

Something anxious wracked George's face, and he took a step closer to Phil. They were only inches apart now.

"Do you think you can do it?" George whispered, soft enough that the guards probably couldn't hear, "Can you kill the Blood God?"

Phil's throat tightened. "I don't know," he lied.

George looked unsatisfied. "Dream wasn't always like this, you know," he said, visibly frustrated. Luckily, his anger didn't seem directed at Phil. "He used to be... I don't know... different."

Phil didn't say anything.

George glared at the castle around them. "I wish I could burn this place to the fucking ground," he whispered, once again too quiet for the guards to hear, "Everything here is a *nightmare*."

Phil was too stunned to stifle his reaction as the advisor led him down to his cage. The disbelief must have been clear on his face, but George said nothing more as he opened the door to Phil and Tommy's room.

All at once, any thoughts Phil had had were gone.

Tommy was on the ground, cornered by two men. Against the wall stood King Dream, arms crossed with an air of complete displeasure.

But Phil's attention was locked on Tommy. Tommy, who was coughing up blood onto the cold, stone floor. Tommy, whose face was an abstract collage of reds and purples, bruised half beyond recognition. Tommy, who didn't even have a chance to look up at Phil before another kick sent his skull directly into the wall.

The kid started laughing. "You guys are *so* fucked. When my brother—"

This time the kick hit Tommy in the nose, cracking it with a sickening *crunch*.

Phil didn't even register his anger until his hands were around the torturer's neck. Someone in the room screamed as he dug his nails into skin. With a single movement, he ripped the man's throat out, spilling blood so violently that it splattered against his own grimacing teeth. Phil spat the iron taste out onto the floor, dropping the man to the ground.

The torturer twitched desperately as his hands pressed against his gushing neck, but Phil had already moved on to his partner. The second man managed to slash Phil's cheek with his sword, but was quickly disarmed, head slammed hard against the corner of one of the cages.

"George!" Dream yelled, drawing his sword. Eyes locked on Phil, the king stepped in front of his advisor and, by extension, the doorway.

Tommy was pushing himself up from the ground, voice cracked and raw.

“Techno!” he yelled, wiping a bit of blood from his chin, “I really need help right now!”

Phil turned, remembering suddenly that three more guards had accompanied George to the cages with him. As Dream pushed his advisor into the hallway, the three soldiers advanced, swords and shields held in front of them. He could hear a few more guards moving in the room just above him, probably alerted by the screams and shouting.

Shit. Phil might have had the advantage of surprise before, but nothing like that would help him now. Quickly, he began to assess the situation. He was outnumbered, with no current weapons. His hands and legs linked together by chains. Tommy was behind him, injured and babbling, vulnerable to attack. The king was standing in the doorway, armed with a gleaming sword, blocking any chance of escape.

He’d faced worse odds. He was pretty sure, at the very least, that Dream didn’t want him dead yet.

“Not an option,” Tommy said, eyes frustrated and vacant as he spoke to no one, “I’m running out of time here, Techno! It’s fucking now or never!”

Phil glanced at Tommy. What the fuck was the kid saying?

He was surprised to see that Tommy was already looking directly at him, expression unreadable as he steadied himself against the wall. For a single moment, their eyes were locked together.

Something softened in Tommy’s face. “Yeah,” he said quietly, still to no one, “It’s for him.”

All at once, the energy of the room seemed to change. It was as though a vacuum had formed around Tommy, sucking everyone’s attention straight to him.

Something in Phil’s heart sank without his understanding.

The kid blinked his eyes wide before laughing. “Thanks, Techno,” he grinned, looking down at the red light emanating from his palms, “I’ll see you soon.”

Tommy stepped forward, reaching out with bloodied hands.

Suddenly, a thin finger ran across the cut on Phil’s cheek. Distantly, he could feel the wound close up, as though the very blood that had been leaking from it was pulling the skin back together.

The feeling spread throughout Phil’s body, as though each molecule of his being was being shined and readied, stronger and healthier than they had ever felt before.

And yet Tommy was still bruised. His legs still shook and his expression still wavered. No piece of that wonderful, warming magic that healed Phil seemed to touch him as his hand slipped away.

“They don’t get to hurt you,” Tommy hissed, stumbling back to the wall for support. “*Kick their fucking asses.*”

The command settled in Phil's bones, but it didn't need to push him forward. He did that himself.

The sword seemed to come effortlessly to Phil's hand, ripped from the grip of a now-dead torturer. Like water flowing down a well-worn riverbed, the weapon swept through the necks of the three guards in front of him, spilling blood onto the stone floor with ease.

It was horrifying. It was invigorating. Phil had never felt more alive in his entire life, heart beating with a force he hardly recognized. He wanted to kill everyone in this castle. He wanted their blood to run in the streets, payment for hurting Tommy.

His mind hardly felt his own, but there was no time to be terrified. He raised his sword, ready to strike Dream down where he stood—

And then Tommy collapsed to the ground behind him.

"Tommy—" Phil gasped, confidence gone all at once. He rushed to the boy's side, but before he could touch the kid, something yanked him back and held him in place.

George was holding his hands up, eyes and palms glowing green with power. Phil felt frozen, not the familiar freeze of tense muscles and short breaths, but something otherworldly, as though a terrible force was pressing down on every inch of his skin, stopping him from moving a single millimeter in any direction. His breath was stuck in his throat, paused, too, by whatever unnatural power was containing him. Only his mind raced forward.

Two guards rushed into the room, staggering back at the bloody mess before them.

"Your majesty!" one of them managed, looking at Dream, "Are you okay?"

It took the king a second to reply. "Get the boy," he said.

"What?" the guard asked, eyes darting between George and Phil.

"On the ground. Get the boy out of here," Dream hissed, "Now. George and I can handle this."

Without another word, the guards picked Tommy up, carrying him out the door like luggage.

Phil wanted to scream. He wanted to kick and push and beg and maim, but there was nothing he could do against whatever power George had. It was as though he was a bug, pinned down on some collector's desk. Not a single part of him could move. So instead, he simply watched as an unconscious Tommy was removed from the room.

George was panting, beads of sweat pooling on his forehead. "Dream," he gritted out, calling the king to attention, "Open the cage."

Without hesitation, Dream unlocked Phil's cage and held the door open. With a swipe of George's arm, Phil was thrown against the back bars, barely able to take a single breath before Dream closed the door behind him and padlocked him in.

All at once, the green light in George's eyes faded. The man stumbled backwards, as though he had been struck.

"That was *awful*," George gasped, steadying himself against the wall. His eyes were locked on the corpses in the middle of the room. "What are we going to do, Dream? This is a disaster!"

"Are you kidding?" Dream asked, his voice edging on giddiness, "This is *fantastic*!"

Both George and Phil tensed, watching the king as he examined one the bodies.

Dream laughed. "I knew you were holding out on us, Angel of Death! Now this, *this* is what I've been looking for! George, this is better than any of the powers XD gave you! *This* is what will kill the Blood God!"

George looked at his king as though he had never seen the man before. "Dream—"

"It's the kid," Dream interrupted, looking towards the cage. Every instinct in Phil's body told him to push himself back and hide, to run, to press himself against the bars until he melted through them, but he didn't. He couldn't. "The kid's what you care about, right? You don't give a shit about me or the kingdom or yourself... you want *Tommy* to be safe."

Phil didn't say anything. This was all too dangerous, too new to him. Was Dream expecting him to negotiate for Tommy? What did he even have to give, other than what Dream had already taken?

"Dream—" George repeated, sounding very much like he was about to be sick, but the king interrupted him again.

"We can work with this," he said, mostly to himself, "This is *perfect*."

Not wasting another second, Dream walked over to Phil's cage, crouching down beside it.

"Here's the deal," Dream said simply, "If you kill the Blood God, I'll let both you and Tommy go free. You guys can get full Essempi citizenship or leave entirely. It makes no difference to me."

Phil's breath caught. It was almost intoxicating, just the mere thought of what Dream was offering. He and Tommy could leave. They could build some tiny cabin and be safe, far from any wars or masters. The idea of exploring the greater world was exhilarating, but doing it with a friend at his side was even better. He could lead Tommy out of that cage and into the sunlight. He had never seen Tommy in the sunlight before.

"But," Dream said, interrupting Phil's train of thought, "if you fail, I'll make sure Tommy is executed."

Philza stopped breathing.

"I mean," Dream said, "my men probably won't even have to kill him themselves. He gave up a lot of information about the Blood God today. He finally broke, told us all kinds of stuff."

I doubt that betrayal will be forgotten.”

Philza could picture it. Tommy, at the tip of Dream’s sword. Tommy, with a guard’s noose tied around his neck. Tommy, a bloody, lifeless mess, the victim of the Blood God’s revenge.

According to Dream, Tommy had betrayed the Blood God. Didn’t it make sense that the deity would want blood as payment? No corner of the planet would be safe for the boy now, unless Philza did as the king said.

Philza had seen countless corpses at his feet, had created more than his fair share, but just the mere thought of Tommy’s dead body made him want to double over and empty his stomach. This wasn’t right. Tommy was too young for all of this.

... But was he? How old had Philza been, the first time someone had been willing to sacrifice him? How old was he the first time he had been put directly in front of Death herself?

Younger than Tommy, certainly. But that didn’t make any of this right.

“Do you understand?” Dream asked.

Philza nodded. That much, he could do. His masters liked it when he showed that he was listening.

“Good,” Dream said, standing and putting out the torch on the wall. George was still watching. There was something akin to disbelief on the advisor’s face. “You better get some rest then. You’ve got a long day of training tomorrow.”

As the door closed behind the king, the room plunged into darkness.

For the first time since he had met Tommy, Philza found himself alone.

Chapter End Notes

See, the entire problem here is that Phil is in a tragedy and Tommy is in a comedy of errors. They really just need to get on the same page, which is going to be tricky, because I just wrote Tommy into another room.

This chapter turned out WAY longer than I was expecting, but I'm happy with it! Hopefully you all get to see it (it's past 11pm where I live, so a bunch of you are probably already asleep oops).

Please consider leaving a comment! I cherish them all like my own children, and they really fuel my writing like nothing else. You can also ask me questions or chat with me on my [Tumblr!](#)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

To Philza's surprise, Dream didn't return the next day, nor the day after that. No one even came to drag him out to training. He was completely alone.

It made the emptiness of Tommy's cage all the more painful. No training meant that there was no way for Philza distract himself. All he could do was sit in silence, wishing for the sound of his friend's voice.

Several times, he broke down completely, crying into his wings.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," he'd whisper between gasps, half in prayer, *"I'm so sorry."*

Outside of those dark moments, he did his best to think of nothing at all.

George appeared exactly twice, bringing Philza something resembling dinner. Both times, the advisor looked frantic and exhausted, stress weighing clearly on his shoulders.

The first day, George didn't say anything, simply leaving Philza with a plate of food and a canteen of water. The moment everything was within reach of the cage, George darted back, closing the door behind him.

The king's advisor was scared of him. Philza wasn't sure how that made him feel.

The second day, George hesitated after giving Philza his food.

"Sorry I couldn't get more, Angel," he confessed. Philza was surprised to hear his voice. "Most of the staff is gone, and no one's allowed in or out of the castle. It's kind of hard to get anything from the kitchen right now."

Philza looked at the piece of bread in his hand. "Is..." he asked, eyes darting to the empty cage beside him. His voice was hoarse from dehydration and disuse. "Is Tommy...?"

George bit his lip. "He's alive. Dream's keeping him close, now that the Blood God's closing in."

Philza's heart did a weird flip. It was as though a noose had just been tightened around his neck.

"You've probably figured it out already," George continued, "but that's why no one's been coming down to get you. Dream basically wants everything on lockdown."

Philza swallowed. "How long do I have?"

“A few more days, probably,” George said, “I’ll try to get you some more practice time, so you can at least stretch your legs a bit before he gets here.”

Philza nodded. “Thank you. I appreciate it.”

George’s face darkened. “You shouldn’t.”

Then, not bothering to grab the plate from the day before, George left, leaving Philza alone once again.

On the third day, no one came to visit Philza until late evening. He raised his head, expecting to see George again. He stiffened when he saw two guards instead.

“Get up,” the larger one said, unlocking the padlock to the cage, “You’re needed.”

Philza climbed out quickly, feeling considerable physical relief as he spread his wings. They had been tucked tight against his body for days.

He wasn’t given much time to savor the feeling. Almost immediately, the guards yanked Philza forward, chains still linking his hands and feet. Stumbling, he let himself be pulled along, trying to grasp his racing thoughts.

One of the guards was holding a glowing, black sword. Philza recognized the weapon. It was the same one the king had handed him in practice. The one Dream claimed could slay gods.

The Blood God was here. That was the only explanation for all of this. Any minute now, Philza, who was aching and half-starved, would be placed in front of the deity and expected to fight.

Philza was a coward. He didn’t want to die now, not any more than he had at 13. That first day on the battlefield, a younger version of himself had almost collapsed in fear. Now, that same terror seemed to strip him bare, begging him to shatter some window and escape.

He couldn’t beat the Blood God. Even with all his training and special weapons, Philza knew that. Some part of him was willing to try, for Tommy’s sake, but he had never truly fooled himself. He was walking towards his own suicide.

Philza screwed his eyes shut, trying to imagine Tommy's face. Maybe Lady Death would take pity on them in the afterlife, finally granting them some small taste of freedom.

But, a quiet part of Philza's brain whispered, *if you could free Tommy, maybe you could run*. It had taken the Blood God days to track down Dream and Tommy. That meant he was fallible. That meant there was a chance, however slim, that Philza could be faster.

“Hey,” the larger guard said, jerking Philza forward another step, “Keep up! We don’t have time for this.”

Phil looked at the man. Then, with a flap of his wings, he yanked the chains out of his captors’ hands.

The movement was more powerful than Phil had anticipated, throwing him an extra 10 feet down the hallway. Startled, Phil looked at his wings, surprised to see his feathers full and unclipped. With a jolt, he remembered the warm feeling of Tommy healing him. It was the first time he had felt whole in years.

Now he knew why.

“Hey!” the larger guard shouted. Both guards drew their swords, advancing towards Phil.

Before another word could be spoken, Phil leapt forward, using his wings to launch himself above his opponents. Within seconds, his chains were pulled tight around the neck of the larger guard, strangling him as they both fell to the ground.

Within another few seconds, the guard's neck was snapped.

The other guard screamed, stumbling backwards a few steps, but Phil closed the gap in an instant. As he slammed the guard into the ground, the glowing sword went skittering across the floor, out of reach.

Phil didn’t need the weapon. It was just as easy to use his chains.

“Where is he?” Phil hissed, pulling tight around the guard’s windpipe.

“Who?” the guard choked, trying to reach for his neck. Phil pinned the man’s hand under his knee.

“Tommy!” Phil insisted, “The Blood priest!”

The guard did his best to shake his head, face turning purple as he weakly struggled. Phil loosened the chains just enough for the man to respond.

“I don’t know!” he gasped, “I swear, I don’t know!”

Without hesitation, Phil snapped his neck as well.

There were keys on the smaller guard’s belt, one of which fit perfectly into the holes on Phil's cuffs. Once freed, he grabbed the glowing sword off the ground and started sprinting down the hallway.

He needed to find Tommy immediately. If Phil’s act of rebellion was made known, the kid would be the one to pay the price.

Almost immediately, Phil found himself in a grand entryway, complete with a crystal chandelier and the most magnificent staircase he had ever seen.

Standing at the other side of the room was George. The man was unarmed, his expression mirroring the surprise on Phil's face.

Slowly, Phil lowered his sword.

"Are you going to protect Dream?" George asked. Phil couldn't tell what answer the man was hoping for.

Phil shook his head. "No."

George took a deep breath. "Okay."

"Oka— You're not going to make me?" Phil asked.

"I couldn't do that even if I wanted to," George said, something sad in his eyes. The man looked tired, but he had a strange aura of acceptance.

"You... you don't want to?" Phil knew he shouldn't be pressing like this, but he was still stunned that someone like George would just let him... leave. He had tasted George's power before. The man could lock him up again if he chose.

George looked away. "Tommy's alone upstairs in Dream's quarters. Once you get to the third floor, turn left and follow the green carpets to the white doors. I left it unlocked."

Something in Phil's chest twisted. It was all too easy. He wasn't sure if he could trust this. "Is this a trap?"

"If I wanted you dead, I'd wait for the Blood God to find us," George joked, a smile cracking across his face. It was the first moment of levity anyone had offered to Phil in days.

Phil didn't laugh. Instead, he bowed, lowering himself to one knee. "Thank you," he said, "for helping Tommy."

George's face screwed up. "Tommy?" he balked, "I don't give a shit about Tommy."

Phil blinked, raising his head. "Then... Then why are you—"

"I know what it's like to be one of the gods' chosen ones," George said, voice serious, "It's fucking dogshit. Even you deserve better than this, Angel." He pointed towards the stairs. "Now go."

Phil didn't know what to say, so without another word, he turned and sprinted towards Tommy. Distantly, he could hear George run in the other direction. He hoped the man would make it out okay.

I'm coming, Tommy, Phil thought, dashing up the stairs, Just wait a little longer.

Within minutes, Phil was standing in front of a pair of white doors. There were smiles carved into the doorknobs, near-perfect miniatures of Dream's hideous porcelain mask.

Just as George had promised, the doors were unlocked. With a deep breath, Phil opened one of them.

On the other side stood Tommy, eyes locked on the doorway as though he had been waiting for someone.

Immediately, a smile broke out across the teen's face.

"Phil!" Tommy yelled, his words filled with joy, "The only man ever! What took you so long?"

Phil practically flew across the room, letting the door slam shut behind him. The king's sitting area was gilded and beautiful, but Phil hardly noticed. With a single movement, he swept Tommy off the ground, hugging him so tightly and suddenly that the boy yelped.

Phil wasn't sure if he had ever felt such raw relief in his entire life. Tommy was safe. He was safe and he was in Phil's arms and he was *smiling*. It was okay. Things were going to be okay now.

"I'm so sorry, Tommy," Phil gasped, fighting the urge to weep. He could feel Tommy's hair between his fingers. Their cages had always been too far apart to do that. "I'm so *sorry*."

"Woah, woah," Tommy said, pushing Phil back slightly to get a better look at him. "What did you do? I literally have no idea what you've been apologizing for this whole time."

"I—" Phil started, eyes desperately skimming Tommy's face. He was relieved to find no bruises or cuts. Phil choked back a laugh. Even this moment, with tears in his eyes, was *wonderful*. He had never seen the Tommy so well-lit. The kid's hair was blonder than Phil had realized. "I'm sorry that I couldn't protect you."

"Protect me?" Tommy asked, incredulous, "I don't need to be protected! I'm a big man, Phil! I've got everything under control."

Phil wasn't sure if anything could be further from the truth.

"Tommy," he said, trying to pull himself together, "The castle is being stormed."

Tommy seemed to perk up at the news. "Really? That's great!"

"No, Tommy," Phil insisted, "It's dangerous. We need to leave *now*."

"Okay!" Tommy said, still smiling, "Lead the way, big man!"

Phil tried to pull him forward, but Tommy stumbled, foot caught. Suddenly, Phil noticed a golden cuff around the teen's ankle, chaining him to the wall.

"Shit," Phil said, "We've got to get that off of you."

"Oh, that?" Tommy said, looking down at the chain as though he had forgotten it was there, "I've got it."

Hands glowing red, Tommy reached down. With a single yank, one of the links broke in two, sending a shard of metal flying into the wall.

“There we go!” Tommy said, sporting a cheerful grin, “Oh, wait, one more thing before we leave!”

Tommy ran to the corner of the room, where a shelf of expensive-looking vases and Fabergé eggs stood. With a single push, the structure toppled over, sending shards of glass and porcelain everywhere with a loud *crash*.

Tommy laughed, flipping over a coffee table and shattering a lamp on his way back to Phil. “I hate this fucking room,” he explained, sticking his hand directly in Phil’s grasp.

Phil squeezed back tightly. Tommy was here. The kid was doing okay. He wasn’t even scared or hurt. If it wasn’t for the homicidal deity storming his way through the castle, this would all be too good to be true.

A wave of determination flowed through Phil. He swore to himself that he would keep Tommy safe, no matter the cost. He wanted to keep that smile on the boy’s face.

“Let’s go,” Phil said, leading the two of them towards the door.

But just before they stepped into the hallway, Phil pulled Tommy back. There was some sort of struggle going on directly outside the door.

“Stay back,” Phil whispered, peeking through the keyhole.

A feeling of dread jolted through every corner of his body. The man, no, the *god* in the hallway was impossibly tall and broad, with long, pink hair tied back into a braid. His expression was one of such furious rage that Phil’s hands began shaking at the mere sight of it. He was wearing clothes too perfect for a king, with a long, red cape, a blood-splattered shirt, and half a dozen medals pinned to his chest.

In the being’s hands was a gleaming axe. It was the same glowing, black material as the sword in Phil’s grip. One well-placed strike, he knew, would be enough to kill any man instantly.

It was only then that Phil saw Dream on the floor. The Blood God stood above the king, axe raised in divine fury, saying some holy words too muffled for Phil to hear, and as the blade came down in retribution—

Phil turned and ran. He did not see Dream’s blood spill or hear any final screams. Instead, he grabbed Tommy’s hand and fled deeper into the king’s quarters.

Phil, accidentally beaming his prayers directly into Tommy's head: *"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry."*

Tommy, trying to yank his chain out of the wall: "What the fuck is Phil talking about?"

Consider leaving a comment! I cherish all of them like my own children. Also, feel free to chat with me on [Tumblr](#)!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

(I upped the chapter count by one, so this is not the end yet.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream's quarters were a labyrinth of rooms and hallways, each area more elaborate and confusing than the one before. Phil couldn't remember the last time he had been somewhere so intricate. He had spent years confined to single rooms, being pulled down corridors with his eyes pinned to the floor. He wasn't used to this. He wasn't used to the constant barrage of doors and choices. The only familiarity was the constant threat of death, closing in on him as he ran.

That, and Tommy.

Every time Phil paused, overwhelmed by the sheer number of options, Tommy would knock over the most expensive-looking item within reach. The kid seemed to relish the sheer carnage, laughing as valuables crashed and shattered against the tiled floors.

Phil was too stressed to scold him for it. The man's heart was beating as fast as a hummingbird's, and his anxious flapping wasn't helping the comparison.

"Oh, hi Techno!" Tommy said suddenly.

Phil nearly jumped out of his skin, but there was no one else in the room. Tommy was talking straight at the wall, eyes vacant.

The teen smiled. "Yeah, no, I'm fine. I'm with Phil." He paused. "I don't know, I'll ask him."

Tommy turned to look at Phil. "My brother wants to know if we're in any danger."

Phil took a deep breath. "Tommy," he said, "Tell your brother that we are in a *lot* of danger, so you need to focus right now, alright?"

Tommy nodded. "Can't speak right now, big man!" he said, eyes drifting slightly, "Phil says we're in a lot of danger so he doesn't want you distracting me. Sorry!"

And just like that, Tommy was entirely focused on Phil once again, face eager as he squeezed the older man's hand.

Phil could hear someone open a door a few rooms back. There was a single pair of footsteps getting closer. Fuck. *Fuck*. Shit. He needed to get Tommy out of here *now*.

Quickly, Phil abandoned all hope of navigating Dream's quarters. Instead, he dropped Tommy's hand, grabbed a chair, and threw it through the window.

The footsteps in the other room paused for a moment before speeding up. They were running out of time.

"Right," Phil said, pulling Tommy towards the shattered window. "We're going to jump using my wings."

Tommy's entire demeanor brightened. "Cool!"

The moment Tommy agreed, Phil yanked him against his chest and leapt through the makeshift exit.

It wasn't flying. The wind in his hair was brief and light. He didn't even flap his wings. They were only three stories up, so gliding down to the courtyard below was easy. Simple. It took seconds.

It was the closest thing to freedom that Phil had felt in years.

The moment he and Tommy's feet hit the ground, Phil turned to look back at the window they had just escaped through.

His breath caught.

Standing in a frame of shattered glass was the Blood God, even more terrifying now that Phil could get a clear look at him. The man glared down with the same horrible fury he had directed at Dream, divine and righteous in ways only gods could manage.

And then, in the next moment, he stepped away and was gone.

"We have to go," Phil gasped, hand shaking as he grabbed Tommy's wrist and pulled.

"Phil!" the teen said, clearly not noticing that anyone had seen them, "That was so fucking cool! You fucking flew!"

"That wasn't flying," Phil said, hastily leading Tommy along into another, larger courtyard. While the last one had been paved, this one was lush and green with a spectacular fountain in the middle and several tiny streams flowing outwards. "That was just gliding."

Tommy looked at Phil with wonder. "Wait, you mean you can do more than that? Can you do, like, a loop-de-loop in the sky? How high do you think you could carry me?"

Right now, Phil doubted he'd be able to fly 20 yards, especially carrying Tommy. His wings ached already, muscles weak and atrophied. It'd probably take weeks to get them back to average strength.

But before Phil could answer, a dozen guards rushed into the courtyard, blocking the doorway that Phil had been heading towards. All of them were heavily armed and armored, as though they had spent the morning preparing for battle.

Phil pushed Tommy behind him, flaring his wings out and raising his sword. Technically, he had the better weapon. Maybe he could manage to take a few guards down and push past the rest.

“Where’s the king?” one of the guards yelled, glaring at Phil.

He swallowed. “The king’s dead,” Phil replied, shifting his feet, “The Blood God killed him.”

The guard in question looked at one of his peers and nodded. Without hesitation, the second one raised his bow, pointing it at Tommy’s head.

Suddenly, with a pop and a gurgle, the fountain began to run red.

Several of the guards, including the archer, jumped back in surprise, watching as a thick, red liquid filled the fountain and rushed into the neighboring streams. At once, the plants began to wither, folding in on themselves like dying soldiers. The moment the streams were full, they began to overflow, leaking red onto the soil and cobblestone, staining the guards’ shoes. In seconds, the entire courtyard was covered in several inches of thick, coppery liquid.

With a jolt of horror, Phil realized it was blood.

The guards were quickly coming to the same conclusion, pushing each other back and racing towards the exit. They were too late. The liquid wrapped around their legs like vines, holding them in place as they were pulled to the ground, blood still rising.

Phil turned to Tommy, desperate to escape from the courtyard, but he stilled when he saw the boy’s face. Red light poured from Tommy’s eyes and hands, spilling out like a warped reflection of the fountain in the center. Phil was overwhelmed by a feeling of *wrongness*, as though he was witnessing something that was never meant to be seen by human eyes. It paralyzed him.

The being in front of him laughed. Phil hardly recognized his friend.

All at once, the blood rose, pushing itself down the guards’ throats like worms. For the first time in his life, Phil heard the sound of men drowning, gurgling and spitting as they thrashed against the ground and clawed at their throats. But nothing they did could stop the substance from overtaking them, filling them more and more with a blood that was not their own as they, one by one, fell still.

And then, as though nothing had happened, the fountain began to run clear again. The blood sunk into the earth, leaking between the crevices in the cobblestone floor, until all that was left was 12 unmoving corpses.

The red light disappeared from Tommy’s eyes, and he collapsed into Phil’s arms.

The moment Tommy was against his chest, Phil felt as though he could breathe again. Shaking, he got the kid back on his feet, looking desperately as Tommy blinked his eyes back open.

A chill rammed its way through Phil's body. How terrible must the Blood God be, if even one of his youngest priests held this much power?

"Tommy?" Phil asked, voice wavering, "We've got to go. The Blood God, he—"

Over the boy's shoulder, Phil could see a pink-haired man enter the courtyard.

Without hesitation, Phil pushed Tommy behind him, wings raised in a desperate attempt to block the kid from view.

"Ow, Phil, what the fuck?" Tommy whined.

Phil swallowed hard, spreading his wings even further as he tried to stand up straight. It didn't matter what the enemy in front of him was. This was just another battle. It didn't even matter if he won. All that mattered was that he gave Tommy enough time to escape.

"Stay back," Phil hissed.

The Blood God blinked slowly as something in his face shifted. His expression was blood-curdling, unleashing something deep and primal in Phil's soul. Phil wanted to fly away, to put as much distance as possible between him and the entity before him, but he couldn't abandon Tommy. He wouldn't.

The god's fingers tightened around his axe. He took a step forward.

Phil nearly stumbled over himself pushing Tommy back. He needed to maintain the space between them and the Blood God for as long as possible. If that thing got any closer to them, Phil wasn't sure if he'd be able to react to his attacks in time.

"Tommy," Phil whispered, "When I lunge forward, I need you to run and hide."

"Why?" Tommy asked at full volume, making Phil cringe.

He almost laughed at the absurdity of the situation. "Because, mate," Phil whispered, a little louder this time, "I'm not letting the Blood God kill you!"

The Blood God in question seemed to startle at that, straightening like he had just been shocked.

"I'm sorry," Tommy interjected, sounding absolutely baffled, "*What?*"

Phil felt one of his wings get yanked down, realizing with horror that Tommy was peering over it.

"Oh, hi Techno!" Tommy said cheerfully. "Have you met Phil?"

"I don't think I've had the honor," the Blood God said humorlessly.

"He's the new friend I was telling you about."

“I’m sure he’s quite pleasant when he’s not in the middle of kidnapping you,” the Blood God replied.

“Kidnap—?” Tommy sputtered, “Oi, he’s not kidnapping me! I’m un-kidnappable, you fucking dickhead!”

The Blood God sighed, sounding remarkably put upon for an immortal being of unknown power. “Tommy, you literally got kidnapped earlier this month. That’s why I’m rescuing you right now?”

“That was strategic, you fucker!” Tommy insisted, “I’ve had everything under control!”

Against all odds, the Blood God smiled.

“I missed you, Toms,” he said, voice unimaginably fond.

And then, before Phil could grab him and pull him back to safety, Tommy burst forward, rushing over to the Blood God and throwing himself into his arms.

Phil choked back a scream, frozen somewhere between confusion and horror, but there was no need. The Blood God simply hugged Tommy back, resting his chin on the top of the teen’s head.

“Bruh,” the Blood God groaned, “You would not *believe* the shit I went through to find you. This is the sixth castle I’ve stormed. I’m pretty sure everyone in this entire kingdom hates me.”

“They’ve got good taste then,” Tommy teased, hugging the Blood God a little tighter.

“I—!” the Blood God protested, voice seeping with mock outrage, “Betrayed by my own little brother... I can still leave you here, you know!”

Tommy smiled. “You wouldn’t.”

“No,” the Blood God said softly, all frustration gone. Moving gently, he laid a kiss on the top of Tommy’s head. “I wouldn’t.”

Phil wasn’t sure if he had ever felt so confused. So, instead of trying to do anything, he just stood there, waiting for things to make sense.

It took a few seconds, but Tommy remembered that Phil was still in the courtyard. “Oh, Phil! This is my brother, Techno!”

Some puzzle piece seemed to slot into place in the back of Phil’s mind. “You... your brother is the Blood God?” Phil breathed, trying his best to keep his sword steady in his hand.

“What? No! He’s not the Blood God,” Tommy said simply, “I am.”

Phil’s brain short-circuited like faulty redstone. He didn’t have time to get his thoughts in line before Techno started speaking again.

“I went to the king’s quarters like you told me to, and the place was completely trashed,” Techno said, looking Tommy up and down for injuries, “I thought someone had kidnapped you again.”

Tommy shrugged. “You were running late, big man. I decided to stage an escape with Phil over here.”

“Why didn’t you break yourself out earlier?” Techno scolded.

“I didn’t have any extra juice until today! *You’ve* been acting like a one-man army all month! I had to use up my powers to keep you alive! Plus, I converted three new people right before I got locked in here, and they went into battle last Tuesday, so I had to use up all my reserves to make sure they got home safe.”

“Tommy,” Techno said, “You shouldn’t be using your powers for other people if you’re in danger. You matter too.”

Tommy bristled slightly. “I *know* that, Techno. But I could survive without the help. They couldn’t.”

Techno did not look pleased. “We have to get you somewhere safer, stat, but this conversation is *not* over.” He looked Tommy up and down again. “Have you been eating enough? Do you need something before we go?”

Tommy groaned. “I’m *fine*, Techno. You sacrificed, like, a *billion* fucking baked potatoes this morning, which, by the way, had way too much fucking salt, you need to lay off on that shit, so I’m good. I’m basically at full power right now.”

A slight hint of relief appeared on Techno’s face. He pulled the teenager back into his arms, burying his nose in Tommy’s dirty curls.

“I’m glad you’re okay, kid,” he mumbled.

“Yeah, yeah,” Tommy said. Phil could hear his smile, even though he was completely engulfed in his brother’s arms. “Missed you too, dickhead.”

Phil just stood there. Only a minute before, the idea of Tommy in that man’s clutches had been the stuff of his literal nightmares. Now the two of them were hugging.

Tommy was the Blood God.

Phil was at a bit of a loss.

Loosening his grip on the kid, Tommy’s brother, *Techno*, apparently, turned his full attention to Phil. “Thank you,” he said, “for helping my brother. I owe you a true debt.”

Phil didn’t know how to respond. “I should have done more—”

“Oh, *fuck* that!” Tommy interrupted, “Don’t listen to him, Techno. He did tons. Phil here’s just traumatized.”

Phil frowned. “Tommy, I’m not—”

“One time,” Tommy said, completely ignoring Phil, “when I was getting beat up, he killed five whole guys for me! They weren’t even trying to hurt him, he just wanted to help me!”

Something dark passed across Techno’s face. “Who beat you up?”

“And another time,” Tommy continued, now ignoring Techno too, “he tried to share his food with me, even though he was literally starving and I had eaten lunch that day! And he always listens to me when I want to talk, and answers my questions and stuff. And when I got lonely in the cage, he would hold my hand between the bars!”

Techno looked at Phil, something deeply grateful in his expression. “Thank you,” he repeated.

Phil was still overwhelmingly confused. “It was really nothing,” he said meekly, “Your brother’s a good kid.”

“I’m not a kid!” Tommy huffed, looking only seconds away from throwing a tantrum, “I’m literally thousands of years older than both of you!”

“And yet you still got kidnapped? Cringe,” Techno prodded, smiling as Tommy balked and stuttered.

“Fuck you,” Tommy groaned, “I’m done with this. Phil’s my favorite now.”

“Oh no,” Techno drawled, voice flat, “How will I ever recover?”

“You won’t. Oh!” Tommy said, struck with a sudden thought, “When we leave, can we bring Phil to that ice cream parlor in L’Manburg? He’s never had ice cream! Also, we need to get him new clothes.”

“Of course,” Techno said, “But I have something for you first.”

Tommy leapt at those words, looking like a kid on his birthday. “What is it?” he asked, automatically reaching for the small pouch on Techno’s belt.

“I don’t have it on me. Gods, you’re worse than a raccoon,” Techno said, easily sidestepping the kid’s attempt at robbery.

Tommy pouted, moving over to Phil. Casually, he grabbed the man's hand, holding onto it with the same soft pressure he always used.

Something settled in Phil’s chest. Everything suddenly felt as though it made a bit more sense.

Techno grinned. “I left it upstairs.”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy, who's about to do the god equivalent of turning off your phone: "Sorry, Tech, in too much danger to talk right now!"

Techno, who's just found his seventh broken vase and is getting increasingly worried: "Wait Tommy no—!"

I've been working on this chapter for days, and if I don't publish it now, I'll fuss over it for another week. Also, this is not the end of this fic! I added an extra chapter so I could have more room to wrap up loose ends without feeling rushed.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Consider leaving a comment (I cherish them like my own children), or chat with me on [Tumblr](#)!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy spent the entire walk to the third floor rambling, telling Phil and Techno everything about each other.

"— And then Techno swept the bitch's legs out from under him! It was fucking badass! I mean, I always knew he was going to win the tournament, but—"

It was good. Things were good. Phil's wings were healed. Techno wasn't trying to kill anyone. Tommy seemed happy.

Phil felt awful.

It was just... none of this made any sense. Phil had been so ready to fight, so ready to *die*, and yet here he was, drowning in uncharted waters, but somehow still safe. Every step he took felt wrong, as though he had strayed from some unspecified path into dangerous territory. He was supposed to be fighting the Blood God. He was supposed to be protecting Tommy. Dream's perfect sword, the God-Killer, was still in Phil's hand, gleaming and terrible. He was supposed to be using it.

But Tommy was the Blood God. And Phil wasn't sure what to do anymore.

He fought the overwhelming urge to just shut down and let things happen to him. Phil had learned early on that it was easier to simply let himself get passed from kingdom to kingdom, accepting new truths and realities without question. Any one of those new masters could have killed him, and they would have been justified. Every time Phil entered a new country, it was with blood already on his hands. During whatever war had led him there, he had killed the new guards' friends, the new servants' brothers, the new king's sons. He saw the hate and apprehension in their eyes, and then watched as it was replaced by greed and hunger. As the men he faced on the battlefield became the ones giving him orders and punishments.

It was easier not to struggle. Or rather, not to struggle until someone told him to.

The old habit was pulling at every inch of him, begging Phil to give in. To not question whatever this new fate was.

He didn't want to disappear into his own mind again, at the mercy of whichever master came first. But he wasn't sure he had a choice.

"Phil," Tommy said. Distantly, Phil could feel something squeeze his hand, "Phil, are you okay?"

He had to respond. He was... supposed to respond to questions like that. He was supposed to show that he was listening.

“I’m fine,” Phil said, breath quick and uneven.

“No you’re not,” Techno said, walking over.

Phil’s heartbeat skyrocketed. Techno wasn’t the Blood God, but some part of Phil’s brain still registered him as a threat. Years of training were all that kept him from flinching back.

“I’m going to say something to you,” Techno said, expression unreadable.

Phil shot to attention. It wasn’t an order, necessarily, but there were instructions hidden in Techno’s words. Phil understood instructions.

“The first time I was sent out onto a battlefield,” Techno continued, “I was six years old.”

Phil’s heart sunk. Six years old... even the Angel of Death had been afforded until his 13th birthday. Had Techno even been able to hold a sword? Had he known what was happening to him?

“I was a messenger. I had to bring letters and orders between different camps.” Techno took a deep breath. “Then, a few years later, they made me a soldier.”

Over Techno’s shoulder, Phil could see the anger on Tommy’s face. The kid was staring at the wall as though he was about to put his fist through it, head turned away to give the other men a facade of privacy.

“I met Tommy about half a year before I deserted. By the time we left, I had been in the army for about 17 years. I could barely remember that I had even had life before the military.” Techno paused. “It was hard, leaving. I didn’t know anything but war. For a long time, I was always tense, ready to follow orders at any moment. I didn’t tell Tommy much about it at the time, but I didn’t know how to just... be a normal person. I’d wake up every morning, expecting to hear a bugle. I’d go to bed anticipating an enemy attack.” Techno smiled. “Hell, it took me five years to learn how to sleep in.”

Techno reached back and squeezed Tommy’s hand. The kid squeezed it back, looking at his older brother with genuine concern. All the anger in his face was gone, replaced with something kind and worried.

“I don’t know exactly what you’re going through,” Techno said, “but I know what it’s like to have a rug pulled out from under you. I know what it’s like to spend your whole life fighting, and I know how confusing it is when someone tells you that you can stop. Because that’s what we’re telling you, Phil. You can stop. You don’t have to be a soldier anymore.”

Phil didn’t say anything, so Techno pressed on.

“It’s okay if nothing makes sense right now. It’s okay if being safe makes you feel unsafe. You’re allowed to be confused and overwhelmed. You can take as much time as you need. But I just need you to know that Tommy and I are here to help you. We’re on your side.”

Phil felt something in him break. With a horrible burst of understanding, he realized that no one had ever been on his side before. He was a tool, an asset. Something to be wielded, and

then discarded without a second thought. Not something to stand by. Not something to understand.

When was the last time someone had treated him with such patience, before Tommy and Techno came along? Maybe one of the priests in the temple? Some rogue trainer in his childhood? Certainly not any of his masters. They would have thrown him to the side long before encouraging his weakness.

But here was Techno, almost a complete stranger, telling him that everything was alright. Not in the shallow way that most people meant it, not in the way that insisted he was fine, but genuinely. Phil's emotions were alright. His confusion was alright. *He* was going to be alright.

Tears were streaming down Phil's face. He curled forward, letting his sword clatter against the ground. Then, arms tight around his stomach, he began to sob.

"Phil!" Tommy gasped, catching the man and hugging him. The boy glared at Techno. "You made him cry!"

"He needs this, Tommy," Techno said, "He's had a long life."

And it was true, wasn't it? Phil had pushed everything down for years, and now that festering grief was ripping out of him all at once. Everything was so terrifying. He had been so scared, not just today or this week, but from the moment he left the temple as a child. Scared of his masters. Scared of the battlefield. Scared that he was slowly, day-by-day, losing more and more of himself.

What was he supposed to do now? Dedicate himself to a god? Run away? Wait for some new master to find him?

Tommy held Phil tighter, rubbing circles into his back. "It's okay," he said, voice uncharacteristically quiet, "I'm not going to let anyone hurt you. No one is going to fucking touch you ever again, I swear."

Phil let himself sob into Tommy's shoulder, choked and ugly. Distantly, some cruel part of his brain told him to pull away. To kneel. Tommy was a god. He deserved more respect than this.

The much louder part of his brain just wanted to be held. So Phil let the boy hold him, glad that there were no longer bars between them.

It took nearly half an hour of reassurances for Phil to calm down. His head and throat ached, dry and empty. He had no more tears left.

"You're okay," Tommy said, running his hand along Phil's temple. The boy's fingers were warm, and almost instantly, Phil's headache disappeared. "Do you need anything?"

Phil shook his head, noticing a wet patch on Tommy's shoulder. He bit down a pang of embarrassment. Wasn't Phil supposed to be the adult? The protector? When had Tommy taken that role from him?

“No shame in a good cry,” Techno said. He had been standing back, giving the other two space, but he stepped forward now. ““Big men are always in touch with their emotions.’ Right, Tommy?”

“Yeah!” Tommy nodded feverishly, looking at Phil with a serious expression. “You’re being brave as shit right now. And fucking badass.”

Tears threatened to reappear in Phil’s eyes, but he blinked them back. He was tired of crying.

“What now?” he asked, voice hoarse.

“Um, well,” Techno said, looking a bit sheepish, “I had a surprise for Tommy, but it might be better if we just call it a day. I’m getting pretty sick of this fucking castle, and I’ve only been here for a couple of hours! I can’t imagine how tired you guys must be of it.”

“No,” Phil said, reaching for his sword, “I want to…” He wanted to be useful. He wanted to walk beside them, to not hold them back, to be worthy of their patience. “We can see the surprise. I want to keep moving.” He looked at Techno. “I *need* to keep moving.”

For a moment, his heart caught, sure that Techno would reprimand him for making a demand, but the man just nodded, helping Phil and Tommy up to their feet and leading them down the hallway.

“Right, um, well…” Techno looked a little awkward, pushing open the doors to Dream’s quarters. It was hard to believe that this was the same terrifying man who had chased Phil through the castle just an hour prior. “If any of this is too much, just let me know and we can —”

Phil stopped listening. Beaten and bruised, left bleeding out in the middle of the room, was Dream, breathing hard as he struggled to push himself off the ground. The same golden chain that had been cuffed to Tommy’s ankle was physically tied around the man’s waist, knotted sloppily as though someone had been in a rush. It matched the golden crown on his head, slightly askew and embedded with emeralds.

Suddenly, the king stopped, noticing the three figures in front of him. His face dropped.

“Angel—!” Dream started, collapsing back onto the ground before he could make any demands.

Phil hardly believed his own senses. “He’s not dead?” he breathed.

“I wanted to save the honor for Tommy here,” Techno said, pulling out his gleaming axe and handing it to his little brother.

Tommy’s eyes grew wide at the sight of the weapon, but before he could say anything, Dream spoke up again.

“What are you doing?” he asked, eyes locked on Phil. With a pinch of shock, Phil realized that the king wasn’t wearing his mask. “You’re supposed to be killing him!”

Phil took a nervous step back, hand tightening around his sword.

“You can’t tell him what to do anymore!” Tommy yelled, visibly mad, “He doesn’t have to listen to you!”

Something resembling fury appeared on Dream’s face. That was new for Phil. He’d never been able to see the man’s anger before.

“You should be fucking dead,” Dream hissed, scowling at Tommy.

“Don’t threaten my brother like that, you bastard,” Techno growled. Even without his axe, the glare he leveled at Dream was enough to make the man freeze for a moment. “I genuinely thought you couldn’t sink any lower. But being a warmongering tyrant wasn’t enough, was it? You had to torture a *kid*.”

“How am I any worse than you?” Dream asked, bewildered, “You slaughtered my generals!”

“I *executed* them,” Techno said, voice low and firm, “for their crimes against humanity. They were killing civilians.”

“It’s a war of survival—!”

“It’s a war of expansion,” Techno interrupted, “Don’t fucking lie to me about that. You wanted to expand your empire’s borders.”

“That’s how the world fucking works!” Dream protested, “Every king on the planet would do what I did if they thought they could pull it off! The bigger my country is, the more control I have, the safer we are. That’s a fact! *Every* war is one of survival! You’re the insane one!”

“Let me get this straight,” Techno said, “You didn’t like what I was doin’, so you decided the best course of action was to kidnap my kid brother and torture information out of him?”

Dream went pale. “I— I was just trying to survive! You can’t fault me for that! I thought you were going to kill me!”

“True. I was going to kill you,” Techno said casually, “But now? Now I’m going to make sure it *hurts* .” He glanced over at Tommy. “What do you think? We can send him straight to the Afterlife. Lady Death still owes me a favor. I don’t want him to be too comfortable down there.”

Tommy scoffed. “You won’t even have to cash it in. She’ll be just as angry as you, once she learns what this bitch did.”

Dream looked towards Phil, rage and fear on every inch of his face. “And what? You’re following *his* orders now?” Dream spit out a wad of blood, pointing at Techno. “Going to play good for your new master? He’s the *Blood God* , Angel of Death! You want to be tied to him for eternity?”

Techno raised an eyebrow. “What did you say my name was?” he growled.

Something akin to terror crossed Dream's face. "The— The Blood God?" he stammered.

A hint of amusement flashed in Techno's eyes. "Wrong."

Tommy ran his hand over the axe's blade, cutting a finger on the edge. Slowly, the blood spread, replacing the glowing purple sheen with something holier.

Dream's eyes widened. "Y—" he started, looking up at Tommy.

"You look so fucking *stupid* right now," Tommy interrupted, anger dripping from every word, "You were such a fucking piece of shit to me and Phil, always going on and *on* about the Blood God, and I was right here, dickhead!"

"That's not possible," Dream said, eyes trained on the axe, "I locked you up—"

"You really don't know shit about gods, do you?" Tommy asked, shaking his head, "If you did, you'd have known what kind of fucking mistake you were making."

But Phil wasn't listening anymore. Dream's hand was creeping towards his waist, grasping for something.

"He—" Phil said nervously, trying to interrupt, but he stopped.

There was a knife in Dream's hands. A knife he was about to throw at Tommy.

Before Phil even registered his own movements, his sword swiped clean through Dream's wrist, sending both the hand and the knife clattering to the ground. Dream screamed, but it was short-lived. With another swipe, Phil's blade went through his throat.

Armed with the God-Killer, Phil stood above the king, watching the blood leak from his neck and the life drain from his eyes.

"You don't," Phil said, breathing heavily, "get to hurt him. You don't get to hurt any of us."

The king did not respond. Within moments, he stopped moving.

Phil had killed him. He had killed his master.

Against all odds, something resembling hope began to creep up on him.

"That was fucking badass!" Tommy said, grinning with pride, "Phil, you are the only man ever!"

Phil almost started smiling. Somehow, the blood on his sword made everything feel more real. He had seen a thousand different corpses at his feet, but not even the first had felt as monumental as this. He had killed Dream. He wasn't the king's slave anymore.

"You just— Your sword was so fucking fast! I didn't even know mortals could do shit like that without help!" Tommy was practically leaping, pulling at Techno's cape in wonder. "You killed him!"

“Yeah,” Phil said, head a bit light, “I did.”

Slowly, Phil leaned over. Dream's crown had fallen from the king's head, but it didn't seem dented. Up close, Phil could notice all the small details and carvings that made up the masterpiece. The embedded emeralds were as gorgeous as ever, just as Phil remembered them. It was a headpiece fit for a god. Hopefully, one that wouldn't mind the blood sticking to his new gift.

Phil turned to Tommy, offering him the crown with nervous hands. "You're... you're supposed to make sacrifices to gods, right?"

Tommy's eyes widened. Then, with the world's biggest grin on his face, he grabbed the crown and put it on his head.

“You’re the fucking coolest, big man!” Tommy insisted. Techno was looking fondly at the kid, not interrupting his excitement. "I love it! I absolutely love it!"

Phil let himself smile. "It's nothing."

"It's not nothing!" Tommy's face fell slightly. "You deserve some nice shit too. Both of you!"

"We don't—" Techno said, but before he could finish his sentence, Tommy plucked two emeralds from the crown, handing them out to the two men in front of him.

"For you!" he said, beaming, "A good luck gift!"

Techno took the emerald without hesitation. "Thank you, Tommy," he said, returning the boy's smile.

Phil looked at the gem in awe. He had never owned anything so beautiful before in his entire life.

"But..." he said, "your crown..."

"It's better like this!" Tommy insisted, "Now, when I wear it, I'll think of both of you! And you can look at your emeralds and think of me!"

Phil's chest nearly burst with affection. He carefully put the emerald in his pocket, intent on keeping it close forever.

Tommy grabbed Phil's hand, still smiling as he continued to ramble. “And now you can come home with us! You can be ours!”

Phil's heart dropped through his stomach.

“Yours?” he whispered, dread clenching his joy and squeezing it dry, “You mean, you’re my new master?”

The disappointment gnawed at every part of Phil. He had dared to hope, for a moment, that he might finally be free, only for the shackles to close around him once again. That

metaphorical weight felt heavier than it ever had before.

He steadied himself. Oh well. If he had to belong to someone, there were far worse masters than Tommy.

The kid's eyes widened in horror. "No!" he yelled, "Not like that at all, Phil. We wouldn't—I wouldn't *own* you. You'd be completely free. I just meant, like, you could be part of our family! You know, like I described in the cage?"

That conversation about family felt lifetimes away, but Phil knew every word of it. He remembered desperately yearning, and then burying that desire.

But here Tommy was, offering everything Phil had ever wanted.

"Family?" he asked, hardly believing the word.

Tommy nodded. "Yeah. I know you don't know Techno that well, but you could! You guys are really going to like each other! And like—I could claim you. As the Blood God. And then you'd get the same protections as Techno!"

Phil looked at Techno. The man seemed so happy with Tommy, joking and bickering as brothers. A part of Phil wanted that too.

But, at the same time, Phil couldn't stop picturing George, trapped and miserable in a prison of his own powers, hurt by the man who was supposed to be his friend. He saw the faces of his old masters, the ones who claimed to know what was best for him as they kicked him to the ground. Dream had asked him, in those final moments, if he was willing to be chained to a god. Now Phil had to find his answer.

"I..." Phil said, after a few moments, "I want to be your family. But I don't want you to claim me."

Tommy looked confused, but before he could say anything, Techno's hand was on the boy's shoulder.

"That sounds good," Techno said, "Right, Tommy?"

Tommy seemed to recognize something very suddenly. He turned back to Phil, smiling.

"Anything you want, big man! Welcome to the family!"

Phil felt impossibly light as Tommy hugged him. Techno patted his back.

He could have this. He could have people who cared about him. Just a few weeks ago, it had been impossible, but now he could be someone new. He could be *free*.

Phil's eyes started tearing up again.

"Oh shit," Tommy said, looking worried, "Do you need some more time to cry?"

“No, no,” Phil said, laughing, “I’m happy. These are happy tears, mate.”

Tommy’s shoulders slumped with relief. “Thank the gods.” He gripped Phil's hand a little tighter. “Let’s get the fuck out of this shithole.”

The walk out of the castle was strangely calm. Vacantly, Phil stared at the portraits lining the walls and the gilded ceilings. He would never see this place again, gods willing, and he was relieved.

Before he knew it, their small party was out in front of the building, the road to the nearby village before them. Phil blinked slightly at the sudden sunlight. The castle was surrounded by mountains, all snow-capped and serene. They were so tall that clouds danced around their peaks. It was beautiful.

It took him a few moments to realize that they weren't alone. Ahead of them on the path was a man, unsuccessfully trying to tug a horse forward.

“Oh, hi George,” Tommy said.

George immediately dropped the horse's reins, body shaking. Within another second, he was on the dirt, bowing. “Please,” he begged, hands clasped in prayer, “Don’t kill me.”

“Nah, you’re alright, big man,” Tommy said, waving his hand lazily, “Hey, you wanna be king?”

George looked up, visibly bewildered. “I— What?”

Tommy hummed. “Well, we killed Dream, so Essempi needs a new king, right? Otherwise there might be a civil war or something, which would be really shit.”

“You... you want me to—?”

“You’ll be great! Can’t be any worse at it than Dream, right?”

George grimaced. Cautiously, he looked at Techno. Then, his eyes shot to Phil.

There was a silent question. Phil nodded, smiling.

“Are you taking the Angel?” George asked carefully, rising slowly back up to his feet.

“His name’s Phil,” Tommy corrected.

George paused. “Oh,” he said, turning to the former angel, “I didn’t realize you had another name, Phil.”

“It’s okay,” Phil said, even though it wasn’t, “And yeah, mate. I’m going with them.”

George nodded. “Good luck,” he said. Phil could tell he meant it.

“Oh, and George?” Tommy’s face grew more serious, “You guys got it mixed up. I’m the Blood God, not Techno here. And if I find out that you’re turning into another Dream, I’ll come back and fuck your shit up.”

Every drop of color left George’s face.

“Anyway, have fun!” Tommy said, grabbing Phil and Techno’s hands. Without hesitation, he pushed past George, shouting over his shoulder. “I kind of fucked up the king’s quarters, so sorry about that!”

George waved, looking more confused than anything else. Then, the new king turned and began walking back to his castle, horse in tow.

The castle. Phil was out of the castle. He was breathing fresh air. The wind was blowing through his feathers.

He was too weak to fly, but looking up at the sky, watching the clouds swirl around the mountaintops, he felt true hope.

“What are you thinking?” Tommy asked, nudging Phil’s side.

Phil pulled his eyes down, meeting the boy’s gaze. “I just can’t wait until my wings are strong enough to fly.”

Tommy blinked. “Why wait?” he asked, squeezing Phil’s hand.

At once, a familiar healing warmth spread through Phil’s body, stretching from his hand to the tips of his wings. With a deep breath, he let it settle.

The new strength was magnificent. Phil looked at Tommy, excited and nervous and full of anticipation.

“Can... Can I...?”

Tommy beamed. “You can do whatever you want now, Phil. It’s your choice.”

Phil matched the kid’s smile. He wasn’t sure if he had ever meant an expression more in his life.

Spreading his feathers, Phil let his full wingspan soak up the sun. Then, with a single flap, he was in the sky, soaring towards the clouds.

Looking at the dirt trail below him, he could still see Tommy and Techno, laughing and smiling as they watched him fly. Phil smiled back, wind rushing through his hair and strength pumping through his blood. With another beat of his wings, he pushed himself higher.

For once, he wasn't scared of landing.

Chapter End Notes

Me, writing a scene where Tommy is pulling both Phil and Techno along: "Tommy has two hands. 😊"

I did it! I finished this fic! 3/4 of SBI have been acquired! Now all that's left is Wilbur >:)

To everyone who commented, "I can't wait for the last chapter to be pure fluff!" ... Um... sorry about that.

I just want to say, thank you all for the overwhelming support on this series. This fic alone has 250 bookmarks, and the series has 190. It's crazy to me that so many of you are excited to read my stuff. Every time one of you comments, it literally fills my heart with joy. Thank you, genuinely.

I might write a one-shot where Blood God!Tommy and Techno show Phil all the things he's been missing, but I also might jump straight into Wilbur's fic. IDK. We'll see. I have some plot things to figure out before I start writing Wilbur's story though.

If you liked this fic, consider checking out some of my others! For example, I have [a newish SBI sci-fi fic](#) where Tommy's a little-brother-shaped android. Plenty of hurt/comfort for all of you to enjoy! You can also chat with me on [Tumblr](#).

EDIT: Did you like this fic? Well great news! I wrote a [bonus scene that's set five days after this story ends. Enjoy!](#)

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!